

When our forefathers signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776, they were standing up against a government that was impeding on their liberties. Through their bravery and foresight, we have this great legacy, these United States of America.

This weekend, Americans across our nation will gather together in celebration of our country's history with parades, concerts, barbeques and, of course, fireworks. And rightly so. We have much to celebrate. We are a unique nation that was and is built on freedom. Freedom that allows you to choose who you want to be, no matter where you come from or where you want to go.

I join you in celebrating our nation's noble beginnings and how far we have come. But as you celebrate this Independence Day, take a moment to remember the people who have fought to not only make our country what it is, but keep it that way. Those who swore to "support and defend our constitution" at any cost. And those service men and women overseas who are still fighting for those same freedoms.

I've always said that our country is as great as it is because of the people who bravely put defending our liberties above their own lives. That's why I fought to serve on the Veteran's Affairs Committee, in order to take care of yesterday's and today's veterans as they've taken care of our country.

And while we've made great progress in support for our veterans, we still have a long way to go. That is why, as we celebrate our country's Bill of Rights, I would like to share my new "Veterans Bill of Rights" to help guide Congress as we work on behalf of veterans nationwide:

Quality, Accessible, and Affordable Health Care. Veterans deserve access to quality health care. It must be convenient, it must be close, and it must be the best in the world.

No Bargaining for Benefits. Veterans shouldn't have to bargain for your benefits, and they are yours by right. Veterans shouldn't be unfairly taxed, they shouldn't have to wait, and they shouldn't have to drown in paper and bureaucracy to get the benefits you earned.

Healthy Homecoming. Veterans must be provided a "healthy homecoming" from theatre. We must improve health and mental health screenings, provide adequate time for family and social adjustment, ensure help and treatment aren't far away, and hold employers to their commitments.

Economic Opportunity. Veterans deserve the most of American economic opportunity. That means a good job, free college or training, secure housing, and small business assistance.

Ensuring Mental Health. Veterans deserve the right to mental health, just like physical health. We will identify the invisible wounds of war and treat them with every resource at our disposal.

Honor Every Veteran. Every veteran should be honored and remembered with dignity. Veterans get the medals they earned, proper markers and burials, and the appreciation of a grateful nation.

Benefits for Veterans' Families. Veterans' family and dependents get access to much of the same care and benefits they get. Being a veteran should mean your spouse and children receive the benefits you earned for them.

Protecting the Flag. Veterans have the right to fly the flag and defend it from desecration. Veterans fought for the American flag. No one can stop you from displaying it, and it should be against the law to mistreat it.

Last weekend, I had the opportunity to meet with a true American hero, Victor Medina, a soldier wounded by an IED blast in Iraq who is struggling to get care for a traumatic brain injury. At the end of our meeting, he handed me the patches that he wore on the day he was wounded, the only things left on his uniform that were salvageable. With this, he also offered a challenge for me to continue the work for our soldiers, one that I humbly accept. As long as I am in office, I

am committed to fighting for our soldiers as they have fought for us.

I look forward to meeting with many of you throughout the district this week and working together for our veterans. Happy Independence Day!